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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role and variability of Greek ethnicity in Des Moines, Iowa, with special reference to the 230 persons who form the core group of the local Greek community. Operating tangentially to this core group network is another series of networks which operate intermittently to include new members of the community. Despite their low community profile, Des Moines' Greeks think of themselves as Greeks or Greek Americans, distinct from the larger community. Lacking distinctive neighborhoods, the Greeks maintain boundaries that are described as polyadic networks. These relationships are often connected through the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church. The community is divided into 2 factions, drawn along the lines of employment and recentness of immigration. The latter expresses itself in the distinction between "Greeks" and "Greek Americans." Unemployment seems to be nonexistent among males in the Des Moines community, with roughly 60% of them employed in some type of food service. A smaller proportion of Greek women work outside the home, in a variety of occupations. (Author/AM)

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ETHNICITY IN THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA[1]

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Introduction. Studies of ethnicity have become increasingly popular in recent years among sociologists and urban anthropologists. In the older literature in these fields, pertaining to the period of peak immigration to the United States (1900-1925), "ethnicity" described the national origin and/or religion of migrating groups. More recently, ethnicity has come to include any trait, cultural or physical, that serves as a symbol of a group's distinctiveness. Significant, also, is the view taken by some anthropologists (e.g., Schein 1975:83) that ethnicity is a process, not a constant. Thus, in a span of 50 years, the term has undergone a shift from a culture-population-group frame of reference to a cognitive and behavioral strategy frame that views ethnicity as a multi-dimensional component of social participation (Bennett 1975). This newer view sees ethnicity as a fluid process and as a cohesive mechanism, as well as visible group behavior. The newer approach is especially significant for the urban anthropologist doing fieldwork in a setting in which ethnic distinctiveness is not readily apparent and where ethnic neighborhoods are not easily definable.

The Greek Presence in Des Moines. This paper examines the role and variability of Greek ethnicity in Des Moines, Iowa, with special reference to the 230 persons (124 adult Greeks, 24 non-Greek spouses, 6 non-Greek widows, 76 children) who form the core group of the local Greek community. The Greeks are one of the smallest and least conspicuous ethnic units in Des Moines, a city of about 200,000 in which the foreign-born constitute less than 1% (U.S. Department of Commerce 1970:Table 81). There is no identifiably Greek residential area in Des Moines, nor do the Greek businesses there carry ethnic designations. Three generations of Greeks live and work in the city with a minimum of friction with the majority population. None of the Greeks interviewed could recall being the object of prejudice, although each remembered hard times and unhappiness. The Des Moines Greeks have no problems that require special social services of the city. Most own their homes, many invest in commercial property, and some have become prosperous. Many of their sons and daughters are either college educated or college-bound.

Despite their low community profile, Des Moines' Greeks think of themselves as Greeks or Greek-Americans, distinct from the larger community. They maintain an Orthodox church and support a priest. They remain in touch with friends and kin living in Greece, and many have returned once or twice to the homeland for extended visits; in turn, grandparents, brothers, and sisters from Greece visit in Des Moines. With less restrictive immigration laws in recent years, new immigrants have located in the city and are becoming supporting members of the ethnic community.

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The development of the Greek ethnic community in Des Moines exhibits steps of maturation noted in other communities by Greek ethnographers (Saloutos 1964, Vlachos 1968, Theodoratus 1971). In Stage 1, the emigrant Greek community is overwhelmingly male, is an economic extension of the Greek village of origin, and is viewed as temporary by its members. In Stage 2, the community gradually grows through fresh immigration of friends and kin from the homeland. A few individuals now have gone home but have returned. And, in Stage 3, when the community reaches somewhere between 200 and 300 members, a church is formed to preserve the Greek heritage. From this point onward, in the eyes of its members, the Greek community is an enduring reality.

In Des Moines, the period of growth and formalization came between World War I and 1928, when the community organized a Greek National Brotherhood with St. George as its patron saint. In 1930 the church building that is still in use was purchased. From 1930 to the 1960's, the community's growth stabilized for several reasons. First, the birth rate in the Des Moines Greek community has never been high. Most couples have two, sometimes three children; many immigrant men remained unmarried, and those who married non-Greek local women produced children with commitments to other groups. Second, immigrant restrictions became more stringent between 1930 and 1960, reducing the flow of new immigrants to a mere trickle. During this period the Des Moines community received only two, perhaps three persons--a lucky bride and a destitute nephew.

Since the present system of preference immigration took effect in 1968, more than a dozen new Greek immigrants have arrived in Des Moines. Unlike the earlier emigrants, these newcomers originate from diverse areas of Greece; only one has come from the city of Filiatra on the Peloponnesus, the birthplace of so many of the older Greeks. Two of the recent emigrants previously tried life in Germany, and about half of the single males have been sailors. In fact, most of the recent arrivals are single males between the ages of 20 and 30, looking for job security with the air of adventurers; whereas the women of the same age category have been sponsored as wives. The three older, married men with families who have recently settled in Des Moines and established businesses (a candy store, a tailor shop, and a steak house) also came in search of economic security, although they cite personal reasons as an additional motive for emigrating. Except for the tailor and the candy store operator, all of these recent Greek emigrants to Des Moines are working in or managing fast-service steak houses.

Core Group, Networks, and Ethnicity. The 230 individuals who form what I call the core group of the Des Moines Greeks' social participation networks are all adult "members in good standing" of the local Greek Orthodox congregation. In other words, they have been baptized as Orthodox Christians, they live ostensibly according to the Orthodox faith, and they satisfy, at least minimally, the financial obligation toward the local church that every adult Orthodox Christian should fulfill. The names of the household heads fulfilling these obligations are published yearly and distributed in booklet form to the congregation. In 1974, when I conducted a census of the community, only 125 of the core group of 230 individuals had parents who were both born in Greece; each year the number declines, as the original immigrant generation dies off. Thus, as a facet of ethnicity, social participation in religious events, rather than

national origin, may be expected to emerge as the dominant criterion of Greek ethnicity in Des Moines.

Operating tangentially to the core group network is another series of networks, which are of the randomly dispersed kind envisioned by Bott (1955). These networks operate intermittently to include new members of the community (e.g., kin from Greece and American Greeks moving to Des Moines), Des Moines Greeks who function only peripherally with the Greek core community, and occasionally, other ethnics and non-minority Americans for such special events as weddings, baptisms, name day celebrations, and religious holidays. For all of those within this tangential aggregate of networks, social participation with the core group will probably include also two festivals, the Orthodox Easter Week celebration (Good Friday and Holy Saturday), and the annual "Greek Night," sponsored by the Daughters of Penelope at a local downtown hotel. One of the popular features of the latter is Greek-style dancing, which follows the featured program of imported Greek musicians, belly dancers, and solo virtuosos.

The number of Greeks who function peripherally with the community is difficult to ascertain, but there must be about a dozen or more adults among them. Within this category there are two types: 1) recent immigrants to Des Moines, and 2) the adult children of the 1910-1920 marriages of immigrant Greek males and non-immigrant, non-Greek females. Each type has its own special variant of ethnic expression, but neither contributes regularly to the financial support of the local Greek Orthodox Church. The recent immigrant often assumes such support eventually, however. It must be remembered that the Church in Greece is state-supported and, hence, new immigrants must become aware of the need to pledge money to insure the continuance of the faith in the United States.

Except for two, previously noted exceptions, recent male immigrants are employed in the fast-service steak houses owned by other Greeks. These newcomers have an inner network of communication, primarily for sharing information about who is working where, but also for joking and occasionally for assistance in apartment hunting. It is significant that although the recent immigrants initially are aloof and maintain networks which are peripheral to the established Greek community, all expect the Church to provide life crises services, and as we have seen, many will eventually join the core community. In contrast, the other peripheral Greeks, the children of the mixed marriages, function almost entirely outside the inner networks of Greek ethnicity.

Even today, Greeks frown upon mixed marriage and exert much pressure upon their young people to marry other Greeks, and certainly, to marry within the the Church. Additional constraint was placed upon the males of the parental generation, the immigrants of 1910-1920. To find wives, these men had two options: return to Greece for brides, or marry local, non-Greek women. Lacking funds for the first alternative and finding the second unthinkable, many of the earlier generation males remained life-long bachelors.

Although the children of Greek male, non-Greek female marriages often are baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church, chances are great that religious education will be imparted by the wife's church, unless the non-Greek wife espouses Orthodoxy while the children are small. The religion of the older (over 60)

non-Greek wives is most frequently Roman Catholic. Understandably, the children of these parents have grown up learning the catechism and expecting to be confirmed and, often, married in the Roman Catholic Church. Sometimes they have accompanied their fathers to the Orthodox Church for special events, and young boys particularly were encouraged to enter the sports and fund-raising campaigns of the G.O.Y.A. (Greek Orthodox Youth of America), which sponsors a basketball tournament among Upper Midwest Greek communities. Even if the sons of the earlier mixed marriages also marry outside of the Greek Orthodox faith, the friendships they develop on the ethnic basketball court tend to endure into adulthood. But even though these ties may promote Greek identity and pride in Greek heritage, they do not draw most of these individuals into the core group of the social network of Des Moines Greek ethnicity.

The network of social participation that radiates from the church incorporates the entire core group and crosscuts the various sodalities and organized activities within the Church. Special attention is given here to one such sodality, the Ladies' Philoptohos Society, because it has a dual function. First, as an adjunct of the Church, the Society works to express ritualistic dogma; second, and as a result, the Society helps to preserve the unique, ethnic tradition. The ladies prepare the sitari (boiled wheat and spices) for memorial services, the vasilopita (a bread called St. Basil's cake) served after Epiphany, and by turns, the prosforon (Eucharistic bread) for each Sunday's communion service.

Ideally, the work of the Philoptohos Society is to be shared by all of the adult women of the congregation; none are to exclude themselves or to be excluded. An analysis of attendance at Philoptohos meetings shows, however, that only about one-third of the 66 adult women of the congregation are faithful, steady workers for the Society. In fact, despite canonical decree, most of the 24 non-Greek wives and 5 non-Greek widows in the congregation do not identify strongly or even at all with the Philoptohos. This means that the bulk of the work of the Society falls to the 28 Greek wives and the 9 unmarried, adult Greek women of the church. This situation appears to be changing, however, perhaps because English is now used in parts of the religious service and is spoken increasingly among church members. In 1974, the priest accorded special commendation to the non-Greek women of the Philoptohos, and especially to two of them for their devoted labor toward the Good Friday services.

Easter Week is the busiest time of the year for the ladies of the Philoptohos Society. They plan and pay for the Epitáphio (the flower decorated bier containing the icon of the dead Christ) and clean the church. In fact, their Easter Week labor is indicative of the Philoptohos' role in validating the bonds of Greek identity. In contrast to the Easter observances of bigger cities, such as Chicago, or even of such same sized communities as Tacoma, Washington (Theodoratus 1971), Greek Easter services in Des Moines are a facet of ethnicity, a mechanism for reaffirming the religious heritage of the congregation and emphasizing that they form a community. The Des Moines custom of having the Philoptohos serve the first Easter meal--a lamb dinner eaten before dawn on Easter morning--to the entire congregation bolsters the concept of community.

The Philoptohos Society plays a similar role on several other occasions during the year. For example, they prepare a Thanksgiving dinner for the whole congregation on the Sunday preceding the national holiday. Bachelors living in downtown residential hotels and elderly couples are especially encouraged to attend.

In summary, for the Greeks of Des Moines, ethnicity is a component of social participation. Lacking distinctive neighborhoods, the Greek community maintains boundaries that are best described as polyadic networks, a series of inter-connected relationships. Radiating from the center of these networks is the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church. Religious participation is defined both by the tenets of Orthodoxy, which determine eligibility for baptism and set the criteria for "members in good standing," and by a sense of national origin. This latter criterion of ethnicity is weakened, however, by the presence of Russian and Serbian communicants who are also regarded by the Church as "members of good standing" and who interact socially with the Greeks.

Among the Des Moines Greeks, then, the Greek Orthodox Church focuses the "sense of peoplehood" (Gordon 1964), defines the networks and boundaries of mutual assistance (Mitchell 1969), and provides the "cradle to the grave"--and beyond--service for this urban "little community" (Redfield 1955). The "cradle to the grave" aspect of the Church was graphically evident on a Sunday morning in May of 1974. Among the communicants was a baby, held in his grandmother's arms. The ritual of communion was followed immediately by a memorial service for a deceased parishioner. The baby had been baptized a few days earlier and was taking communion for the second time; the deceased had died a year previously. The Orthodox dead are mourned on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after death, and thereafter on the anniversary of death. Once an individual has been baptized in the Church, he never really leaves it.

Factionalism and Cleavage. In the larger metropolitan centers, the Greek immigrants have tended to settle near kin or village compatriots, extending to the United States the old country's regional and intervillage rivalries. As a result, Greek communities in this country are noted for their number of internal factions (Saloutos 1964, Theodoratus 1971, Fairchild 1927, Burgess 1913). The Greek community in Des Moines is smaller and more homogeneous than the corresponding units in larger cities, and factionalism is comparatively benign. To be sure, one faction once locked the church doors against an opposing faction. But, for the past 15 years, differences of opinion within the church have focused on such mundane and less explosive problems as whether or not there is a need for a new church building or whether bingo would help balance the budget. There is always criticism regardless of which course of action is taken on any internal issue, but eventually the work of the church gets done (Cunning 1975).

There are, nevertheless, two generalized sets of factions or cleavages in the Des Moines Greek community. One may be called the "steak house people" versus the rest of the church community. Friction exists between these two factions because the steak house employees have to work seven days per week. Of these people, the disparaging remark is heard from the rest of the community, "They are so busy out making the almighty dollar, the only time we see them is at Easter."

The other area of internal strife is a cleavage rather than a faction: "Greeks" versus "Greek-Americans." The recent immigrants who are employed in the steak houses and have not yet become managers or owners refer to themselves as "Greeks" and, sneeringly, to the rest of the ethnic community as "Greek-Americans." Reciprocally, the latter have deprecating views of the newcomers: "That new bunch of Greeks can't be trusted; they aren't like the rest of us." Or, "All they want to do is come over here, make a small fortune and go back to Greece and live on easy street." Established community members are especially critical of recent Greek immigrants who marry American women: "Those girls are just being used; they will be cast off when it suits their (husbands') convenience." Recent immigrants are often said to be in the United States illegally and to have married Americans solely to avoid deportation. The actual number of illegal entries is probably much exaggerated. I know of only one case, that of a man who walked across the Canadian border. Interestingly, his marriage to an American has survived for four years now, and the couple have recently taken an extended trip to Greece.

Although the recent immigrants rely upon the established Greek community for job training and opportunities, their overall adaptation is different from that of the original immigrant generation, at least, initially. The newcomers rarely attend and do not pledge financial support to the church; hence, they are not "members in good standing." As I have already noted, these new immigrants tend to marry American women, whom they meet at work in the steak houses, rather than aspiring to bring a bride over from Greece or remaining bachelors. Each new immigrant goes through a transitional period of adjustment, frequently stated to last about five years. During this time, the cleavage between the new immigrant and the rest of the Greek community is sustained by the newcomer's disdain for the "Greek-Americans" and by the separate newcomer networks discussed earlier. After about five years, however, many of these recent immigrants begin to identify with and participate fully in the established Greek community.

Greek Employment. As Saloutos (1964:28) observes, Greeks in the United States have become identified with the restaurant business. The Des Moines Greek community is no exception; roughly 61% of the adult males are or have been occupied in some kind of food service. Some of the restaurants operated by the older emigrants (the 1910-1920 generation) are reputed to have been fine eating places, but the majority of their businesses were very small enterprises of the "Coney Island" or chili parlor variety, located downtown. Except at one location, none of these older restaurants survive. Today, Des Moines' Greek-operated restaurants are fast-service steak houses located on major urban arteries.

Figure 1 presents the employment breakdown by age category among the Des Moines Greek males. As noted above, a disproportionate number (29 of 37, or 78%) of the 60-and-over age category are or were restaurant owners or workers. The 59-31 age category shows a much lesser commitment to the restaurant business (15 of 39, or 38%) and an appreciable entrance into the professions and semi-professional businesses (insurance, real estate, sales). The self-employment emphasis remains; even the second generation sons who have entered the sales fields have done so as agents or manufacturers' representatives who set their own sales goals.

All of the 30-and-under males engaged in the restaurant business have emigrated since 1970. Not one Des Moines-born Greek of this age category has entered this occupation. Because of the concentration of the older emigrants in the restaurant business, this occupation affords the easiest entry for the recent immigrant, who typically does not speak much English. In addition, there are only two cases in Des Moines in which the management of a Greek-owned restaurant has been assumed by the owner's son; all of the other Greek restaurant owners--regardless of age--were born in Greece. When asked if he wants his son to follow him into the restaurant business, a Greek man has one of two replies. Either he says he will let his son decide the matter, or else he is emphatic in desiring that his son escape the hard work and long hours of the restaurant business.

Figure 1: Occupations of Adult Greek Males in Des Moines, Iowa, by Age (1974)

Occupation	Age Category			Totals
	60 & over	59-31	30-22	
Owner of steak house, tavern, "Coney Island"	11 (7 retired)	12	2	25 (28.7%)
Employee of steak house, tavern, "Coney Island"	18 (11 retired)	3	7	28 (32.1%)
Owner of shoe repair shop, leather goods shop	3 (1 retired)			3 (3.4%)
Dancer, hotel bellhop, salaried tailor, salaried funeral parlor director	3 (all retired)	1		4 (4.6%)
Lawyer, dentist, pharmacist, schoolteacher, statistician		6	1	7 (8.0%)
Salesman (paper stock, engineering services), regional office manager (insurance, stockbroking)		10		10 (11.5%)
Candy store owner	1 (retired)	2		3 (3.4%)
Other (street contractor, semi-skilled factory employee)	1	5	1	7 (8.0%)
Totals %	37 42.5%	39 44.8%	11 12.6%	87 100.0%

Unemployment in the Greek community appears to be non-existent among males. Even the 23 men who responded during in erviews that they were "retired" continue to work on an as-needed basis, up to three or four hours daily, mostly in steak houses or "Coney Islands." The shoe repairman indicated in Figure 1 classifies himself as retired because he has sold the business; actually, he works 30 hours per week in the shop.

Figure 2 shows that there is less employment variability among females than males. Generally speaking, Greeks do not approve of women's working outside of the home, especially mothers of young and school-aged children. Of the 66 adult women of the core group (including non-Greek wives and widows), only 29, or 43.7%, were employed outside of the home. Interestingly, 8 of the 18 employed women in the 59-31 age category have never been married.

Except for the steak house employees, who account for nearly one-third of the employed women, the Greek working woman has some specialized training. One is an executive secretary and holder of two Master's degrees. Another is a buyer for a large department store and an officeholder in a national Greek fraternal organization. One is a partner in a real estate firm, and another received a Chamber of Commerce citation in 1974. And the four schoolteachers enroll in postgraduate work during summers.

Figure 2: Occupations (non-domestic) of Adult Greek Women in Des Moines, Iowa, by Age (1974).

Occupation	Age Category			Totals
	60 & over	59-31	30-22	
Office manager, executive secretary, secretary		9		9 (31.0%)
Apartment house manager	2			2 (6.9%)
Sales (clothing, real estate)		3		3 (10.3%)
Schoolteacher		3	1	4 (13.8%)
Steak house employee	1	2	6	9 (31.0%)
Other (nurse, skilled factory employee)		1	1	2 (6.9%)
Totals	3	18	8	29
%	10.3%	62.1%	27.6%	100.0%

networks that converge upon the local Greek Orthodox Church. A variety of strategies of distinctiveness on the part of the local Greek community will doubtless result in the future emergence of still other criteria of ethnicity.

Note

1. Data for this paper were collected from September 1973 to June 1975. A much fuller presentation is available in Cunning (1975).

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Accommodations to Change. Within the Des Moines Greek community there is a growing awareness that as the young mature the importance of the Greek language and an overriding sense of national origin will diminish as significant cohesive mechanisms. Nevertheless, there is a realistic hope that the Greek Orthodox Church, while recognizing the changes that are occurring within the parish, will continue to serve as the arbiter of the Greek cultural heritage. Since 196[illegible], when the national conference of Orthodox clergy and laity voted to incorporate more English into the liturgy, the Des Moines church has introduced more and more English into the service. The language change has been effected gradually and irregularly, in order to make the transition easier for the older parishioners, who were the principal opponents of the change. The major prayers are now recited in both English and Greek, and increasingly, the lesser prayers are spoken in English only. Although announcements are made in both languages, the sermon is now delivered solely in English. The pew rack contains books in both languages, accompanied by pictorial outlines of the priest's movements, designed to serve all levels of language comprehension.

On the other hand, Des Moines' Greeks are not relying solely upon the church to promote Greek solidarity and counteract outside cultural pressures. All Greek parents still urge their children to marry other Greeks, or at least to marry within the Orthodox faith. Parents actively support their children's participation in the various intra- and inter-city events of G.O.Y.A. (Greek Orthodox Youth of America). During G.O.Y.A.'s spring athletic tournaments, a bus is chartered for as many as can attend, and church does not convene that weekend. The priest and some of the parishioners speak of building a "cultural center" to preserve Greek traditions, but at present, the idea is no more advanced than a small but well-chosen library in the church basement. A middle-aged, Greek-born woman teaches an always filled Greek folk dancing class for the Des Moines Public Schools Adult Education program. In 1975, however, only about one-half of the class enrollment of 15 were Greeks; the others were persons (e.g., an exchange student going to Greece, an anthropologist with a wedding invitation) who for various reasons wanted to be able to participate in Greek festivals. Greek parents express approval of the Greek school that the priest conducts one day each week in the parish house, even though scheduling conflicts often intervene to prevent full participation of Des Moines' Greek children in the priest's language and culture classes.

In short, the Greeks of Des Moines do not seem to be caught in the so-called "...unique American dilemma, the ethic of cultural pluralism...pitted against...the ethic of assimilation" (Mead 1975:185; cf. Kupferer and Rubel 1973, Yetman and Steele 1971). The Des Moines Greeks have always participated in the larger sociocultural system to the extent of their being self-supporting, tax-paying, law-abiding citizens. At the same time, they have maintained their sociocultural distinctiveness. This distinctiveness has not resulted from any explicitly assimilative actions taken by the numerically dominant society; on their own testimony, the Greeks in Des Moines have not been subjected to any significant prejudice or assimilationist pressures from the dominant elements of the city. Rather, Greek ethnicity in Des Moines is an aspect of the internal organization of a portion of the city's population that immigrated from Greece or are descended from such immigrants. Although national origin per se and language were once the dominant parameters of Greek ethnicity in Des Moines, today this ethnic identity is largely a matter of participation in the social

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